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Compiled by Mildred Camacho-Castillo and Janet Wolf

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ASSEMBLING A SERIOUS SYSTEM

(Continued from page 53)

which brightens things further. And most record producers, especially in popular music, add even more boost in the upper octaves with equalizers.

When you start making your own tapes with a couple of microphones and two-track equipment you will almost certainly find that your recordings are both more natural-sounding and less bright than their commercial counterparts. So the monitors that sound best with your recordings may be harsh and unpleasant with many commercial records and tapes. My recommendation is to choose the best speakers for your tapes and use an equalizer as needed for commercial recordings: Considering what has been done to them, the equalizer can only improve things.

The most important characteristic for a monitor is that it clearly reveal differences in microphones and their placement. You can check for this quality before you've made tapes of your own by noting which speakers seem to change their sonic character the most—frequency balance, stereo imaging, and so on—from recording to recording. This is a sign that the speaker is revealing things about the recordings, not about itself. In fact, if it's hard to pin down the speaker's characteristic sound, and if it keeps surprising you, you're on the right track. A corollary of this is that the system should sound unspectacular most of the time. Speakers that bowl you over are doing something of their own to all source material. They may be hard to resist, but grit your teeth and keep looking.

Listen for a speaker's ability to elicit detail. It should be relatively easy, for example, to follow a single instrument in a small ensemble. But beware—some speakers achieve this by coloring parts of the frequency range. An individual instrument should, therefore, be both identifiable apart from the ensemble and sound reasonably like itself.

One final point. Even the best speakers and room add colorations to the sound, but the ear can learn to compensate for many of them so that it becomes possible to "listen through" to the source. On a good set of monitors you can evaluate the source without much effort, instead of constantly striving to ignore the speakers. A system that seldom calls attention to itself will serve you long and well. **HF**

RICHARD THOMPSON

(Continued from page 94)

pragmatic, out of necessity, and aesthetic, out of choice. I decided it was time to go into the studio and make music in which everybody played in the same room at the same time—to actually record performances.

Even though I had always tried to do that, I had gotten caught in the trap of perfectionism. "Shoot Out the Lights" was a good example of the only kind of recording I'm interested in doing now—not spending a lot of time at it, and getting it right as much as possible live. These days, you too often hear a sound that is of fantastic quality over the radio, but that unfortunately contains no music. It's a case of improving the sound at the expense of the performance.

Backbeat: How did you arrive at the instrumentation on "Hand of Kindness"? You've used brass in the past, but this time you added some really gutsy saxes.

Thompson: Each record tends to come along as just a different experiment. There's no real sequence in my mind from one to the next. On this one, it was a good idea to bring in a horn section on a couple of tracks, and having brought them in, it was interesting to use them on most of the record.

Backbeat: Will the same ensemble be used for the tour?

Thompson: We'll probably have the same line-up as on the record, with a couple of saxes and accordion. And we'll probably use a bigger rhythm section.

Backbeat: One element of your recent success that I hesitate to bring up is its relation to your private life. I can't help wondering how it must have felt to finally receive recognition, only to have the most widely-read pieces, especially that profile in *Time*, focus more on your separation from your wife than on your music.

Thompson: Well the *Time* piece was a little sensational, I thought. It was handy in the sense that it had a wide readership, so I didn't have to go around explaining to people that my marriage had just broken up—most people had already read about it. Obviously, I would rather people were more interested in the music.

Backbeat: Is it too soon to ponder what the next album will entail?

Thompson: I feel very inclined to make a real pop record: short songs—everything under three minutes—with snappy lyrics, recorded live in the studio.

Backbeat: One last thing. I have to congratulate you on the surprising news that you now have a fan club in the U.S.

Thompson: [Laughing] yes, there is one. It's quite good, too, really very well organized.

Backbeat: I assume they'll conduct it in good taste, with no official lunchboxes or pencil cases.

Thompson: You might get a T-shirt, though. **HF**